

# Meeting Script

## *INTRODUCTION*

"We welcome you to the **Good Grief Network Step Program** and hope you will build personal resilience and empowerment, and strengthen community ties within this fellowship. This group is not a therapy program nor is it a space to dwell in our heavy emotions. Instead, it is a place to cultivate love, support, and growth focused on collective grief and widespread systems collapse. We seek to find the delicate balance between unrealistic optimism and angry nihilism.

We who live with an understanding of climate injustice, the loss of our imagined future, ecocide, and other systemic problems understand as perhaps few others can. We know the world is full of grief and suffering. We feel it and want to practice methods to cope and invest our energy in meaningful ways.

The **Good Grief Network** offers an opportunity where individuals can build resilience that empowers us to face the challenges of these overwhelming systemic issues without succumbing to numbness, despair, or denial. This work is about embracing and navigating vulnerability, our heavy human emotions, and the pain of the living in a destructive culture.

Our goal, when each step has been worked, is to live grounded in wisdom with fresh ideas and perspectives. We awaken and begin to see the world with social constructions broken down and are able to look beyond current systems for solutions. We practice the steps as tools moving forward.

This program may also help lead to **meaningful action**. While action has many definitions, we'll learn to access and strengthen our own unique skills, talents, and experiences. The Good Grief Network doesn't recommend a single course of action, as we realize systemic problems are complex. Instead, we use what we've learned and created to drive change in our own ways.

Please be respectful of the group and limit your sharing to a few minutes. Before sharing twice, create space for everyone to share once. Help others feel welcome to take part in the dialogue created. Speak from your heart and your truth - we are not here to convince others of our beliefs, but to be witnessed on our journey and help raise consciousness.

This step program is loosely based on the Twelve Steps (adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous), where we try, little by little, one day at a time, to apply to our lives."

**GROUP INTRODUCTIONS [the facilitator chooses a type of check in for the meeting].**

## **BUSINESS UPDATES**

- “Are there any group announcements?”
- [Optional] “Who is willing to lead next week’s meeting?”

## **INTRODUCE THIS WEEK’S STEP**

Read the introduction from the manual and if the facilitator wants to, share a personal story as it relates to this step. After sharing a story, announce that the floor is now open for others to share.

## **ANNOUNCE: The Floor Is Open For Sharing**

10 Minutes Before Closing The Facilitator Asks:

"As this meeting comes to a close, does anyone have a burning desire to share?"

## **WRAPPING UP**

“We’ll end by going around the circle with a check out [the facilitator chooses a type of check out.”

Announce Next Week’s Step That Will Be Covered.

# **CLOSING**

"In closing, the opinions expressed here were strictly those of the person who gave them. Take what you liked and leave the rest. We’ll be back next week to work the next step. We’d love to see you, too."

# Step 1

## Accept The Severity of the Predicament

*"Acceptance does not mean surrender. It does not mean resignation. Acceptance means I am finally available to the entire spectrum of creative response."*

—Trebbe Johnson

It is in this step where we aim to understand the problematic ways in which humankind operates on this planet. When we catch glimpses of the problems and their severity, don't look away. We must invite the grief to move through our whole animal body. The planet and our species need us to be awake and aware right now. This requires acknowledging the difficult truth of where we're at as a culture.

We've lost our way. Consumerism, pervasive violence, global warming, the sixth mass extinction, water and food shortages, mass-produced propaganda, and skyrocketing rates of depression all point to the errors of our ways. Our systems are failing us. A delicate balance exists between false optimism and overwhelming pessimism. Reality exists between these two polarities. We aim to live within these two extremes.

Regardless of which collective problem most paralyzes us, remember that balance is a practice. We wobble. We fall. We get up and get to work again. Like any practice, balance gets easier the more we do it.

Now is the time to rise to the challenge. Let's envision new ways of existing, together.

First, we accept the problem and its severity. After accurately discerning where we are, we can focus on the path to arrive where we want to be.

# Step 2

## Acknowledge That I Am Part Of The Problem & The Solution

*"Walls turned sideways are bridges."*

—Angela Davis

By living within the Western paradigm, we have all played a part in getting us to where we're at culturally, socially, ecologically, and politically. We can do a lot to minimize our carbon footprint. Still, many of us drive, fly, and over-consume. We buy into the consumerist ideology, failing to notice how the system is designed to enslave us with debt. We must confront the old notion that our ability to consume defines our individual worth.

Once we're aware of these systems and our role in perpetuating them, we can no longer be held captive by our guilt and shame. There isn't time to be suffocated by these feelings surrounding our role in the problems. We're using the tools provided by this system to help create a just future. With this level of acceptance, we can address and correct these problematic habits little by little and create systems that actually serve our planet and us.

# Step 3

## Practice Being With Uncertainty

*"No one can possibly know what is about to happen: it is happening, each time, for the first time, for the only time."*

—James Baldwin

This culture is rigid. We're conditioned to make little, or no, room for uncertainty. We want guarantees, plans, and perfection. We desire to feel secure and think certainty means security. Yet, control is an illusion. We can calculate the odds of every risk, but there is always some amount of uncertainty that exists. We minimize risks by making smart choices and planning, but there will always be external forces beyond our control. We live on a dynamic planet and our perceptions are limited. There is more to existence than we can take in. Can we give up our need to control the outcomes of our actions? The more we convince ourselves of a certain outcome, the less resilient we are. Can you take risks and chances and find meaning in our daily lives knowing that our existence is unpredictable?

Practicing flexibility moves us out of a fight/flight/freeze response when we experience the unexpected. This allows us to respond from a place of patience and compassion. We must befriend uncertainty to exist in this time and place, and to preserve our sanity.

# Step 4

## Honor My Own Mortality & The Mortality Of All

*"A civilization that denies death ends by denying life."*

—Octavio Paz

Death is a natural and normal part of every life cycle. You will die, as all living things do. Nothing is free from death—not pets, not that person you're certain you can't live without, not even the sun. Death is natural. Still, the high rate in which we humans are killing off other species feels nearly impossible to take in. We're extinguishing other species so quickly that we're responsible for an extinction event. Humankind has become the first species to control the course of evolution.

How do we remain present while knowing death is inevitable and avoid becoming obsessed by it or dwelling in the dark? Death and life are interrelated. One cannot exist without the other. It is through death that meaning is made. We are alive for such a short time. Heart attacks, accidents, and illness hurl curve balls at the ones we love and us. Nothing is guaranteed. Once we accept the inevitability of death, we can be more alive in the present moment.

How we die matters. We die how we live, so let's live fully while we're alive!

# Step 5

## Do Inner Work

*"If you begin to understand what you are without trying to change it, then what you are undergoes a transformation."*

—Krishnamurti

Our personal wounds add weight to the heavy emotions we feel on a collective level. We can deny, repress, or run from our personal struggles until we collapse under them. Or, we can face them with courage, recognizing that feelings are both mental and physical experiences that shape, but do not define us. In doing so, we choose to use this extra baggage and its weight for strength-training a little at a time, rather than buckling underneath it. Our grief then becomes a tool for connection instead of a roadblock to plough through or avoid.

Our culture has deemed some of our feelings acceptable and others taboo. Yet, until we can feel the entire range of our emotions, we cannot truly confront these systemic predicaments. Limiting our range of feelings prevents us from being truly alive. All emotions are transient and recurrent. For example, we don't "face our despair," and then never have to think about it again. Feelings are lenses that color our perception of the world. Try each lens on without judgment. What is it about each different perspective that helps create a richer, more meaningful life?

It's critical to learn methods for processing our feelings, because we're all ultimately alone. Community offers solace and support, but each of us wakes up and falls asleep in our mind. If we can't work through our own feelings, the help of a community is limited. We must each commit to a full life experience and build community from that place.

# Step 6

## Develop Awareness of Brain Patterns & Perception

*"Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in."*

—Isaac Asimov

We think we are rational creatures, but we are not. We construct our reality based on the information collected and processed by our instincts, cognitive biases, five senses, and complex thinking. The combination is limiting. We can't know what we don't know. If we never learn how our brain overcompensates for our limitations, we are held captive by the illusion of our perception.

An untrained brain will always react without awareness of our limitations, but we can help our minds become calmer, steadier, and less controlled by fear. In other words, we must learn how to cultivate a non-reactive state of being instead of allowing our limited perceptions to be in control.



# Step 7

## Practice Gratitude

*"The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction."*

—Rachel Carson

Between the sensationalized daily news, intra- and interpersonal drama, and the weight of our collective problems all competing for our attention, each moment can feel overwhelming. Practices like meditation, yoga, gratitude, mindfulness, appreciating beauty, and creating meaning rewire our brain, creating new neural pathways helping to overcome our default responses. Through these practices, we fight the paradigm of stress and speed and drop into the portion of our brain that processes information more thoroughly. From this space, we have better control over our reactions. When we remove ourselves from the constant distractions and allow ourselves the time and space to get quiet, we can observe our thoughts instead of identifying as them. These practices gift us moments of calm and lucidity amidst the chaos. They also make us more open to both creating meaning and recognizing beauty.

Beauty and meaning are not optional; they are survival tactics and are available to us if we make the decision to pursue them. Terry Tempest Williams writes that, "Finding beauty in a broken world is creating beauty in the world we find." No matter the situation, we can find a beautiful action, connection, scene, or moment. Beauty and meaning serve as reminders that there is something outside of us worth living for.

Desperation, depression, and threats to our safety can make it seem that meaning and beauty aren't available, but as long as there is life, they exist. We only have to make the effort to look or remember times when we have experienced a deep sense of awe and wonder. This sustains us.

# Step 8

## Take Breaks & Rest As Needed

*"Caring for myself is not a self-indulgence, it is self-preservation,  
and that is an act of political warfare."*

—Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light*

Each of us has personal limitations that we must respect. When your mind or body requires rest, take a break. Being in a place of awareness and vulnerability is taxing, and because we've committed to feeling our feelings and working through past trauma, we'll have developed enough self-awareness to know when we need to take a step back for a moment and regroup. Do what you need to do to refresh yourself and return to the work. Otherwise, you risk burning out. We need you and your energy.

Are you willing to give yourself this moment to recharge? The work will be there when you return.

# Step 9

## Show Up

*"The moment that you feel that, just possibly, you're walking down the street naked, exposing too much of your heart and your mind and what exists on the inside, showing too much of yourself. That's the moment you may be starting to get it right."*

—Neil Gaiman

Now that we have done some healing through self-reflection and building self-awareness, we need to turn the focus externally. When we're feeling vulnerable, we're quick to downplay our experiences by hiding or internalizing that which makes us feel exposed. Part of the human condition involves encountering these uneasy situations and instead of shying away, we lean into the discomfort, showing up for what makes us vulnerable. We cannot permit fear of pain or humiliation stop us from participating in life. There is strength in pushing through that which makes us uncomfortable. There is power and energy in asserting that we're not going away. Life exists in the moments we show up. To shy away from these experiences is to miss the essence of being alive. So, we must be brave. We must take chances. And we must commit to being the main character in each of our lives.

Show up for yourself.

# Step 10

## Reinvest Myself Into Meaningful Efforts

*"You never change things by fighting the existing reality.  
To change something, build a new model that makes the  
existing model obsolete."*

—R. Buckminster Fuller

The final step is to use the wisdom, energy, and resilience that we've cultivated through the other steps to inform our every action. When we're open to our interconnectedness to all beings and the natural world, we make decisions based on compassion and insight instead of egocentric motivations. Instead of thoughtless and selfish actions, we reinvest ourselves with an understanding of the consequences to the larger world. This new type of effort must come from our inner stillness and from our Love for ourselves, each other, the natural world. It will be well-intentioned and well-informed, colored by our perspective, experience, and courage. Unless we've undergone an intensive process that forces us to seek truth from within ourselves, rather than having "truth" pushed on us, any action with regard to our collective problems will perpetuate the same social, political, and economic systems that are failing us.

Now is the time for each person to find her opportunity to be powerful. Action and power don't have to mean risking arrest or giving up on civilized society and living in a yurt. Action and power exist in the decisions we make with compassion, insight, respect, and Love. Our next moves must be made from a place of inner calm and outward reverence. A truly just and sustainable world is made up of awake, resilient, and connected people.